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# **Security Assistance Foreign Representatives: Customers and Partners**

**By**

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A select group of individuals work out of twenty-four separate offices on the Naval Inventory Control Point's (NAVICP) Mechanicsburg and Philadelphia campuses. They do not wear U.S. Navy uniforms. Their accents suggest distant shores to the ears of casual listeners. They work and play very hard and they are very, very good at what they do. They are our customers and partners in the enterprise known as foreign military sales (FMS); they are security assistance foreign representatives (SAFRs) assigned to the NAVICP.

A SAFR is a fully accredited member of a foreign military or defense establishment tasked with representing that government's official business with the United States Navy. The vast majority of them are military officers and they range in rank from Chief Petty Officer to Flag Officer. Their postings at the NAVICP will vary from two to four years. They are, first and foremost, officially tasked with serving the needs of their respective governments.

There is almost a forty-year legacy of foreign representatives at Naval Supply Systems Command field activities. The Italian Navy established the first SAFR office in 1962 in Bayonne, New Jersey, where the predecessor to the Deputy Commander for International Programs of the NAVICP (Code OF) was located. Over those forty years, twenty-six countries have established SAFR offices. The eighteen international customers with SAFR offices at NAVICP constitute the largest and most active customers of the Navy's FMS program. These facts speak to their impact:

- The Navy FMS Management Information System for International Logistics (MISIL) caseload has a total value of \$42.5B; SAFR countries have MISIL cases with a total value of \$31.8B.
- NAVICP managed FMS cases have a total net case value of \$3.3B, SAFR countries have cases with a total net case value of \$3.0B.
- Through the first three quarters of fiscal year 2001, FMS customers worldwide registered \$855M in transactions on MISIL; SAFR countries accounted for \$702M of that total.

All SAFR offices focus on logistics aspects of FMS cases assigned to NAVICP; the location and monitoring of secondary item delivery is their bedrock responsibility. Some may also have financial management responsibilities for these cases. SAFR offices with a logistics-only mission rely upon their embassies for financial management. Thus, most SAFRs have extensive experience as logisticians prior to their posting. Senior SAFRs typically have over twenty years logistics experience in their own military prior to selection. SAFR selection is no small matter for their government; in most cases the final selecting official is a flag level officer.

More than representatives of their governments, SAFRs serve as linchpins between their military and defense systems and the U.S. supply system. They arrive as the experts on their system and processes and they must quickly become familiar with the U.S. system. Eventually they serve as the bridge between both systems, explaining their system to our FMS personnel and, in turn, explaining the U.S. system to their countrymen. They stay vigilant to changes to the U.S. system as, what might seem minor changes to us could have major ramifications to them. They

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host very important visitors from their countries and play key roles in case reconciliation reviews that are conducted to ensure currency and accuracy of FMS case records.

Almost to a person, SAFRs acknowledge that the NAVICP International Program Directorate Team, composed of program analysts, weapon systems experts, and repair specialists, supporting the Code OF FMS case managers, constitutes the major resource in helping the SAFRs perform their duties. The teams go beyond case management and supply processing support by familiarizing the SAFR with our system and introducing them to people who provide services that lay outside NAVICP control. SAFRs will readily suggest that if they had one piece of advice to offer their replacements it would be to get to know their Code OF integrated program country team early on in their tours. The respect SAFRs show their country teams is returned in kind by those teams. It is a commonly voiced sentiment among the teams that SAFRs are invaluable resources, able to bridge cultural and language gaps at all levels. Returning SAFRs have long term, beneficial impact on FMS processes by applying the lessons learned during their tours when they resume working back in-country, saving time and money for all concerned.



**May 2001 group photo of SAFRs with RADM Mike Finley, Commander, NAVICP and CAPT Tom Steffen, Deputy Commander for International Programs, NAVICP.**

Code OF recognizes that new SAFRs have needs beyond business requirements. SAFRs are normally accompanied by their families. Upon arrival they face some fairly basic but critical issues: finding a place to live, establishing bank and credit card accounts, obtaining a driver's license, getting kids into school, etc. Perhaps transparent to U.S. citizens, these issues can be daunting to a newly arrived foreigner. The SAFR Support Group (Code 762) assists the new arrivals in acclimating to life in the U.S., addressing the full range of quality of life issues, enabling the SAFR to focus on what his country sent him here to do. The SAFR community is universally appreciative of the services provided. The excellence of this unique service has been

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recognized on our side through award of a Hammer Tool Kit for providing “innovative and effective services”.

SAFRs work closely with their colleagues at the NAVICP. At times, they find problems they are dealing with on their program may be a common one shared across a number of weapon system platforms and customer countries. An effective vehicle used to report problems to U.S. authorities is a series of regular SAFR meetings with NAVICP management. Chaired by Code OF, these quarterly meetings deal with the full range of supply processing issues and problems experienced by the international customer. The U.S. side benefits from gaining visibility of problems early enough so that quick and effective action can be taken.

SAFR participation in improving processes is not confined to the NAVICP. They have played key roles in reinvention initiatives sponsored by Navy International Programs Office and Defense Security Cooperation Agency. The SAFR community has proven a rich recruiting source for international customer participation on teams that developed the Dual Track initiative, and are developing alternatives to current stock investment arrangements as well as changes to information systems which support FMS programs.

They become enthusiastic members of the international community, forming life-long friendships, participating in the full range of social activities open to them. Whether it is playing golf, participating in NAVSUP-sponsored social activities, or challenging U.S. officers in a free-spirited football (we call it soccer) match there is a kinship and bond that builds up among this group of professionals. They host a round robin series of luncheons with their colleagues featuring distinctive cuisine of their homelands. And at year's end, one of the most sought after invitations is to the SAFR-hosted Holiday Party where they prepare favorite dishes to be sampled and savored.

While they are in the U.S., they take advantage of the opportunity to travel the length and breadth of the country. Starting out slowly, with a business trip here or there, they quickly gain an appetite to see more of what this country has to offer. By the time their tour has ended, it is not unusual for SAFRs to report having visited over thirty states. Indeed, one recent departing SAFR managed forty-nine out of fifty states during his three-year tour. They bestow unqualified praise for the richness and natural beauty of America and the warmth and diversity of its people.

SAFRs come to us first as our customers. They quickly become our partners in the enterprise of FMS. By the time we part company, we do so as friends. It would be hard to imagine life at the NAVICP without them.

### **About the Author**

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